

Sexual initiation and premarital sexual partners and the quality of bond, communication, and perceived marital match among young adult spouses¹

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Marta Komorowska-Pudło^a ✉

^a Marta Komorowska-Pudło, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7222-0182>,
Institute of Theological Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Szczecin, Poland
✉ Corresponding author: marta.komorowska-pudlo@usz.edu.pl

Abstract: The quality of marital relationships, including emotional bond, communication, and the perceived compatibility of partners, has long been of interest to researchers. Among the various factors influencing relationship quality, premarital sexual experiences are increasingly recognized. Due to the scarcity of research on this topic within the population of Polish spouses, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between the number of sexual partners and the type of first sexual partner (spouse, former romantic partner, non-romantic partner) and the quality of marital relationships among young adults, specifically regarding bond, communication, and perceived partner match. The study also explored the relationship between the quality of the marital relationship and regret over initiating sexual activity with someone other than the spouse. The study involved 306 married individuals (153 women and 153 men) aged 20 to 35. The research was conducted using a diagnostic survey in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Three standardized psychometric tools were used (the Marital Bond Scale by Józef Szopiński, the Marital Communication Questionnaire by Maria Kaźmierczak and Mieczysław Płopa, and the Marital Match Questionnaire by Jan Rostowski and Mieczysław Płopa), along with an author-developed questionnaire. The results showed that women who had sexual experiences exclusively with their spouse scored significantly higher in the areas of bonding and marital compatibility than women whose sexual initiation occurred with a non-romantic partner, as well as those with a higher number of sexual partners. As the number of sexual partners increased, women reported lower levels of emotional connection, intimacy, and self-fulfillment, and higher levels of spouse devaluation and relationship disappointment. Among men, no statistically significant relationships were found. For women, regret about sexual initiation with someone other than the spouse correlated with a lower sense of marital compatibility. The results obtained allow us to conclude that premarital sexual experiences may have a long-term impact on the quality of marital relationships, especially among women.

Keywords: marital relationship quality, first sexual partner, premarital sexual experiences, sexual initiation

1. The significance of sexual initiation and types of premarital relationships for marital relations – a review of research

During late adolescence and early adulthood, involvement in romantic relationships constitutes one of the key developmental tasks (Erikson, 2004). During this period, alongside the need to relieve sexual tension characteristic of puberty, a need to form bonds emerges, initially in pre-intimate relationships and later in romantic ones (Gurba, 2012; Oleszkowicz & Senejko, 2012). Then, romantic partners play a vital role in the emotional and social life of young people (Joosten, Nelemans, Meeus, & Branje, 2022).

Nowadays, it is common for adolescents and young adults to engage in sexual activity both within romantic and non-romantic relationships (Kotiuga, Yampolsky & Martin, 2022). Research shows that some teenagers engage in sexual activity with a single partner in the context of romantic relationships, while others have a larger number of partners. Early initiation is associated with an increased number of sexual partners (Bancroft, 2019). Researchers indicate that between 10% and 20% of adolescents report having had sexual intercourse with at

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/62P_komo.pdf

least four partners. (Control & Prevention, 2019, from: Khalili, Mirzazadeh, Chegeni, Abedi, Rajaei, Ardalan, Haghdoost, Nasiri, Sharifi, 2020; Steele, Simons, Sutton, Gibbons, 2020; Wakasa, Oljira, Demena, Regassa, Daga, 2021). Boys typically report having more sexual partners than girls (Bancroft, 2019), although recent years have seen an increase in the number of partners among women as well (Smith & Wolfinger, 2024). Despite the rise in the percentage of sexually active individuals at the end of the 20th century, the average number of partners among young adults has remained relatively stable since the 1980s. (Martinez, Copen, Abma, 2011).

As a key moment in psychosexual development (Higgins, Trussell, Moore, & Davidson, 2010; Vasilenko, Lefkowitz, & Maggs, 2021), sexual initiation can influence an individual's well-being and attitudes toward sexuality (Lew-Starowicz, 1990; Vasilenko, Lefkowitz, & Welsh, 2014). Research indicates that both the nature of premarital relationships and the number of sexual partners are significant for the quality of later romantic and marital relationships (Kansky & Allen, 2018). Lew-Starowicz (1990, p. 43) emphasizes that "the sexual and emotional conditions shaped by these early sexual experiences" may affect the quality of future relationships. Sexual initiation, regarded by the author as a pivotal moment, influences not only the development of sexual needs but also the shaping of personality, attitudes toward one's partner, and the overall perception of interpersonal relationships. Its positive effects are most likely to emerge when partners share mutual love, demonstrate psychological maturity, possess a sense of responsibility, have adequate sexual knowledge, and act by their personal value system.

A crucial factor in the psychosexual development of young people is who their partner is during their first sexual experience and what kind of bond connects them. The long-term consequences may vary depending on whether the experience occurred in a casual encounter, a short-term relationship, or a stable romantic partnership. The set of questions concerning sexual initiation, typically asked during sexological diagnostics related to sexual dysfunctions, confirms the significance of this experience.

These questions concern, among other things, the nature of the bond and emotions shared with the initiation partner, the feelings accompanying the event, who initiated the experience, the duration of the relationship, and the reasons for its ending, if applicable (Lew-Starowicz, 2021). The significance of premarital sexual experiences within different types of relationships for the formation of intimate bonds in adulthood stems, among other factors, from the differing behaviors partners display toward each other, the level of emotional connection between them, and the impact of these experiences on self-esteem in both partner and sexual roles. Additionally, this is linked to the various ways individuals cope with these experiences in the face of challenges.

A romantic relationship is a voluntarily and consciously entered partnership based on mutual acceptance, understanding, honesty, loyalty, care, friendship, and love, as well as elements like jealousy and longing. Partners establish mutual expectations and boundaries, spend significant time together, engage in intense communication, express emotions through words and physical closeness, and work to maintain the stability of the relationship. Such relationships support the development of an attachment system rooted in love, closeness, bonding, and a sense of security. They serve as preparation for marital life by teaching individuals to recognize differences between partners, resolve conflicts, and cultivate personality traits essential for long-term relationships. (Putri, Yuniarti, Minza & Riyono, 2021). Barbara Jankowiak (2023) points out that young people strive to form intimate relationships based on commitment, love, and passion, and the absence of these elements may lead to the dissolution of the relationship. The foundation of a healthy romantic relationship lies in communication and negotiation skills, caring behaviors, authenticity, mutual respect, trust, and honesty (Hielscher, Moores, Blenkin, Jadambaa, & Scott, 2021). Tyler Jamison and Caroline Sanner (2021) observe that commitment-based relationships foster the development of skills necessary for building intimacy and interdependence, helping individuals achieve a balance between independence and closeness.

Jamison and Sanner (2021) distinguish six types of romantic relationships in the context of development. The first type is romantic experimentation, which involves short-term, superficial relationships with limited interaction and minimal emotional and physical bonding, typical of childhood and adolescence. The second type is infatuation – a romantic or sexual interest that does not develop further due to a lack of mutuality or situational barriers. The authors consider infatuation a subtype of romantic experimentation. The third type are casual sexual encounters (hookups), limited exclusively to sex, even if one or both parties desire something more. The fourth type is casual dating, in which partners explore a romantic relationship by spending time together and occasionally engaging in sexual activity, without future plans and with the possibility of dating other people at the same time. The fifth type is time-bound dating – a short-term relationship that is emotionally and physically intense but ends due to an anticipated change, such as the end of summer vacation. The sixth type is committed relationships, in which partners experience increasing emotional – and usually physical – intimacy and expect continued commitment and a shared future.

The exploration of romantic and sexual preferences among adolescents often includes experimenting with different types of relationships, partners, and sexual practices (Arnett, 2015, as cited in Olmstead, 2020). Most teenagers engage in monogamous, long-term romantic relationships in which they have their sexual experiences, while others go through them in a series of short-term relationships, casual encounters (hookups), relationships with friends (friends with benefits), or during spontaneous sexual meetings (booty calls). (Baldus, Elgán, Soye, Tønnesen, Arnaud, Csemy & Thomasius, 2023; Olmstead, 2020; Van de Bongardt, De Graaf, 2020; Yu, Luo & Xie, 2022). In the second decade of the 21st century, there has been an increase in the number of individuals engaging, with mutual consent, in non-monogamous sexual relationships (such as polyamory, swinging, and open relationships). This phenomenon involves both individuals with and without romantic partners (Olmstead, 2020). Non-monogamous relation-

ships are based on commitment and emotional investment with one or more partners (Sizemore & Olmstead, 2016), whereas relationships centered around casual sex typically lack an element of commitment (Olmstead, 2020). Research indicates that boys are more likely than girls to engage in casual sexual encounters (Olmstead, 2020; Van de Bongardt & De Graaf, 2020).

Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz (1990) distinguishes four types of sexual initiation: with a partner towards whom one feels no emotional attachment; with a future spouse as a way of testing compatibility; with a more experienced individual; and after marriage, when both partners are inexperienced. According to the author, each of these types can lead to different emotional experiences and consequences for future relationships. Initiation without emotional bonding may result in a separation of sex from love, difficulties in forming deeper emotional connections, and a tendency toward further casual encounters. Sexual compatibility testing can be unreliable, as sexual maturity develops over time and requires patience and a suitable emotional climate. Initiation with a more experienced partner carries the risk of comparisons and jealousy, especially if the experience is not mutual. However, at a high level of maturity, such comparisons may not occur. In contrast, initiation after marriage may lead to disappointment but can also foster the development of shared sexual experience, provided it is accompanied by trust and mutual openness.

Boys and young men are more likely than girls and young women to experience positive emotions related to sexual activity – both during initiation and in subsequent encounters (Higgins et al., 2010; Marván, Espinosa-Hernández, Orihuela-Cortés, 2018; Reissing, Andruff, Wentland, 2012; Schwartz & Coffield, 2020; Vasilenko, Walters, Clark, Lefkowitz, 2022; Walters & Lefkowitz, 2023). These experiences are often accompanied by a sense of fulfillment in their gender role, frequently expressed through dominance (Marván et al., 2018). This applies to their experiences in both long-term relationships and casual encounters. (Conley, Klein, 2022; Reissing et al., 2012; Schwartz, Coffield, 2020). Men's positive emotions related to sexual initiation may stem from

the experience itself, regardless of the nature of the relationship with their partner. However, for boys who undergo sexual initiation with a partner with whom they do not share a close emotional bond, negative consequences may arise, such as concerns that the partner might expect a deeper level of commitment (Vasilenko et al., 2022).

Research shows that most girls and women experience physical discomfort (pain) during sexual initiation, along with lower or no sexual and psychological satisfaction, as well as ambivalent emotions, ranging from anxiety, shame, regret, and guilt to contentment and joy (Boydell, Wright, Smith, 2021; Conley & Klein, 2022; Hawkins, DeLuca, Claxton, Baker, 2023; Richters et al., 2022; Schwartz & Coffield, 2020; Vasilenko et al., 2014; Vasilenko et al., 2022). Positive outcomes of sexual initiation and later sexual experiences, including psychological satisfaction, are more often associated with emotional closeness to the partner. (Higgins et al., 2010; Vasilenko et al., 2022). Sexual experiences can often be traumatic for girls, especially when they are treated in a hurtful way by their partners. In cases of casual relationships or one-time sexual encounters, some girls reported experiencing pressure (Reissing et al., 2012), coercion (McClinton Appollis, Jonas, Beauclair, Lombard, Duby, Cheyip, Maruping, Dietrich & Mathews, 2021), and even violence (Hawkins et al., 2023).

Lew-Starowicz (1997) emphasizes that traumatic experiences related to early sexual encounters and intimate relationships can lead to the development of sexual disorders. This phenomenon is associated with the formation and reinforcement of dysfunctional cognitive schemas that affect the interpretation of subsequent sexual experiences (Smith & Shaffer, 2013). As a result, difficulties such as vaginismus, dyspareunia, or anorgasmia may arise (Lew-Starowicz, 1997, 2004). These mechanisms are explained by sexual script theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1973, as cited in Beisert, 2023) and the concept of encoded sexual responses – deeply ingrained patterns that significantly shape the quality of one's sexual life in adulthood (Imieliński, 1990). Researchers emphasize the role of classical conditioning (Bancroft, 2019; Imieliński, 1990) and the law of first reflexive-conditioned connections (Lew-Starowicz, 2004). As Lew-Starowicz

(2004) notes, an individual's sexual biography – particularly that of a woman – significantly influences later sexual needs and behaviors. According to the principle of generalization, a positively experienced sexual initiation can foster the development of satisfying relationships and emotional bonds. Conversely, a negative experience may lead to inhibitions, difficulties, and failures in the sexual sphere. The sources of disappointment vary by gender. Among young men, these may stem from unrealistic expectations, an excessive focus on intense sensations, emotional immaturity, egocentrism, primitiveness, sexual hyperactivity, and overly rapid sexual responses. Among young women, disappointment is often linked to pain during defloration, the partner's lack of emotional involvement, and his instrumental approach to the sexual act – manifested in a conqueror-like attitude rather than that of someone seeking a relationship based on mutuality and emotional connection. A high level of emotional maturity, personal culture, sexual awareness, and emotional bonding fosters a satisfying initiation experience. In such cases, potential difficulties, such as awkwardness or temporary disruptions, are experienced more mildly (Lew-Starowicz, 1990).

Research indicates that when adolescents engage in sexual activity with someone they have affectionate feelings for – typically within a romantic relationship – the initiation is more often associated with positive outcomes compared to encounters with casual or unfamiliar partners, especially among girls (Higgins et al., 2010). A high level of comfort within the relationship and satisfaction with the first sexual experience help mitigate negative emotions. For young women, positive experiences were strongly linked to the presence of love, emotional closeness, and psychological comfort, which often served as prerequisites for deciding to initiate sexual activity. For men, these factors were not of significant importance (Schwartz & Coffield, 2020). Research by Tracy Walters and Eva Lefkowitz (2023) shows that nearly 90% of eighteen-year-olds experienced physical satisfaction and a greater sense of closeness with their partner during subsequent sexual encounters. Similarly, Sophie Hawkins and co-authors (2023) found that more intimate sexual behaviors within romantic relationships in early adulthood correlated with high-

er sexual satisfaction compared to casual encounters. Individuals in romantic relationships also demonstrated higher levels of sexual communication and greater assertiveness (Van de Bongardt & De Graaf, 2020). Partners in romantic relationships were more likely than those involved in casual encounters to talk about their sex life, needs, boundaries, monogamy, contraception, and the risk of sexually transmitted infections (Lehmiller et al., 2014). As emphasized by Veronica Smith and Matthew Shaffer (2013), sexual initiation experienced in the context of intimacy and mutual respect promotes higher satisfaction (both physical and emotional), better sexual self-esteem, and lower levels of depression. Research by Paige Harden (2012) further indicates that engaging in sexual activity within romantic relationships during adolescence increased the likelihood of marriage, while non-romantic relationships were more often limited to sexual encounters only.

Research indicates that adolescents and young adults who begin their sexual lives with casual partners are more likely to experience negative consequences – such as psychological distress and feelings of regret – compared to those who initiate sexual activity within romantic relationships (Marván et al., 2018; Vasilenko et al., 2022; Wesche, Lefkowitz Maggs, 2021). Among women, sexual initiation outside of a romantic relationship was more frequently associated with lower self-esteem and depressive symptoms than among those who engaged in sex with a romantic partner or remained sexually inexperienced. No such correlation was found among men (Grello, Welsh, Harper, 2006). Casual sexual relationships often carry complex emotional outcomes and are evaluated both positively and negatively. Decreased well-being was particularly reported by young people when sexual encounters occurred under the influence of alcohol, lacked satisfaction, involved low levels of familiarity with the partner, or were accompanied by a lack of self-acceptance regarding their actions (Wesche, Claxton, Waterman, 2020). Casual encounters were often associated with substance use (Wakasa et al., 2021) and a higher risk of sexual violence (Baldus et al., 2023). High-risk sexual behaviors, characterized by limited self-control, were correlated with reduced psychological well-being, stronger feelings

of regret, and poorer mental health (Wesche et al., 2020). Sexual activity in casual relationships was also associated with lower physical and emotional satisfaction (Wesche et al., 2021), more frequent feelings of guilt, and a lack of readiness for sexual intercourse (Vasilenko, 2022). Short-term relationships are characterized by lower levels of intimacy and commitment (Jamison & Sanner, 2021). Research also shows that a higher number of sexual partners is linked to negative health and relational consequences. Among adults with such experiences, there was a higher incidence of sexually transmitted infections, more unplanned pregnancies, and lower quality of romantic relationships (Kahn & Halpern, 2018). Similar patterns were observed among adolescents, where more frequent sexual contacts correlated with poorer physical and emotional health, as well as lower quality of future relationships (Cadely, Finnegan, Spears, Kerpelman, 2020).

There is limited research on the relationship between premarital sexual experiences and the quality of marital relationships; however, the available analyses allow for several important conclusions. Individuals who engaged in sexual activity before marriage more often reported lower marital satisfaction (Sassler, Addo, Lichter, 2012) and were more likely to form lower-quality relationships (Stanley, Rhoades, Markman, 2006; Teachman, 2003), with a higher risk of divorce (Smith, Wolfinger, 2024; Stanley et al., 2006; Teachman, 2003), compared to those who postponed sexual initiation until after marriage. Premarital sexual activity had a stronger negative impact on marital functioning and divorce risk for women than for men (Smith & Wolfinger, 2024). Women who began their sexual lives before marriage more often experienced conflicts and weaker communication with their partners (Sassler et al., 2012). In contrast, premarital sexual restraint was associated with better marital relationships regardless of gender. Couples who postponed sexual activity until marriage reported higher relationship satisfaction, better communication, and a lower risk of divorce (Busby, Carroll, Willoughby, 2010). Similar patterns were observed among individuals who began sexual activity after becoming engaged. Their marital relationships were characterized by

greater commitment, better communication, and higher satisfaction compared to those who became sexually active before engagement (Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, 2009). Jay Teachman (2003) found that premarital sexual activity exclusively with one's future spouse did not increase the risk of marital problems or divorce among women (men were not included in these analyses).

The greater the number of premarital sexual partners reported by spouses, the lower the quality of their marriage (Teachman, 2003). They also reported lower sexual satisfaction (Davis, Shaver, Widaman, Vernon, Follette, Beitz, 2006) and were more likely to engage in infidelity (McNulty, Meltzer, Makhanova, Maner, 2018), which contributed to a higher risk of relationship dissolution (Paik, 2011; Smith, Wolfinger, 2024; Teachman, 2003). Research suggests that individuals who engage in premarital sexual activity with multiple partners may develop more permissive attitudes toward sexuality and a heightened awareness of alternatives, such as infidelity, that weaken marital stability (Paik, 2011; Teachman, 2003). Some may even perceive infidelity as attractive (McNulty et al., 2018).

Negative or ambivalent emotions related to sexual initiation, resulting from factors such as social pressure, manipulation, or dissatisfaction with the experience itself, increase the risk of divorce later in life (Paik, 2011). Similar outcomes are observed in cases where initiation occurred under coercion (Heaton, 2002). In contrast, positive experiences during first sexual intercourse are associated with no increased risk of marital dissolution (Paik, 2011).

Analyses also show that an increasing number of young people engage in sexual activity within the first month of a romantic relationship, which correlates with lower marital quality later in life, especially for women (Sassler et al., 2012). These experiences are also linked to poorer communication between women and their future spouses (Busby et al., 2010). Relationships in which couples quickly initiate sexual intercourse tend to be characterized by impulsivity, lack of planning, and emotional entanglement, which makes it more difficult to end unhealthy partnerships (Sassler et al., 2012). Such couples are less likely to discuss long-term goals, more likely to experience

anxiety within the relationship, and are at greater risk of forming unstable and unsatisfying relationships in the future (Stanley et al., 2006). On the other hand, individuals who delay sexual activity in romantic relationships demonstrate a greater readiness to maintain marital stability and report higher relationship satisfaction (Busby et al., 2010). The longer a couple postpones engaging in sexual intercourse, the better the quality of their future relationship, including improved communication, less conflict, higher levels of commitment, intimacy, emotional support, and sexual satisfaction (Busby et al., 2010; Sassler et al., 2012). People who initiate sexual activity later tend to have fewer romantic partners and report greater relationship satisfaction (Harden, 2012).

2. The methodology foundations of the author's research

The study aimed to analyze the relationship between the type of partner at sexual initiation and premarital sexual experiences, and the quality of marital relationships among young adults. The research question was formulated as follows: to what extent does the nature of sexual experiences – including the type and number of partners – differentiate the quality of marital relationships in young adults? The hypothesis stated that the number and type of sexual partners moderately differentiate the quality of respondents' marital relationships dependent variable was the quality of marital relationships, measured in the areas of bonding, marital communication, and the sense of compatibility with the spouse. The independent variables were the number of sexual partners before marriage and the type of partner at sexual initiation. Three types of partners were distinguished: (1) current spouse, (2) former romantic partner from the time of sexual initiation, and (3) non-romantic partner (e.g., friend, acquaintance, casual partner).

The diagnostic survey method was used, employing three standardized research instruments: the Marital Bonding Scale by Józef Szopiński (1980) (covering empathy, mutual understanding, and cooperation), the Marital Communication Questionnaire by Maria Kaźmierczak and Mieczysław Płopa (2006)

(measuring support, commitment, and depreciation toward the spouse), and the Marital Compatibility Questionnaire by Jan Rostowski and Mieczysław Plopa (2006) (including scales of intimacy, similarity, self-fulfillment, and disappointment in the relationship).

Before conducting the main statistical analyses, the assumptions regarding the data distribution for the key dependent variables were checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test. In most cases, the results of these tests ($p < 0.05$) indicated significant deviations from a normal distribution, which justified the selection and use of non-parametric tests. For comparisons between two independent groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was used, while the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied for comparisons among three groups. Relationships between variables were analyzed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. When statistically significant differences were found in the Kruskal-Wallis test, further post hoc analyses were conducted using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction to precisely locate the sources of these differences between specific groups. For all conducted statistical tests, appropriate effect size measures were calculated and reported: the r coefficient for the Mann-Whitney U test, the ϵ^2 (epsilon squared) for the Kruskal-Wallis test, and Spearman's correlation coefficient ρ (rho) was treated as a measure of the strength of association. These steps were taken to ensure the reliability of the analyses and to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the results by current scientific reporting standards. Both statistically significant results and trends ($p < 0.09$) were considered due to the unique nature of the study.

Data on the number and type of sexual partners were collected using an original questionnaire. The sample was selected using a non-random, purposive sampling method. The participants were married individuals aged 20-35, born in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The study included 153 women and 153 men. The average age of men was 30.41 years, and the average age of women was 29.05 years. The mean duration of marriage was 5.22 years, and the average length of the relationship before marriage was 3.31 years.

3. Selected aspects of premarital sexual experiences and the quality of bond, communication, and perceived compatibility between spouses.

Results of own research

The study conducted among young adults revealed that the majority of respondents engaged in premarital sexual activity (74.51% of men and 66.01% of women) (Table 1).

The partner in respondents' sexual initiation was most often someone with whom they shared a close emotional bond. For 43.14% of men and 48.37% of women, this partner was their current spouse, with 25.49% of men and 33.99% of women initiating sexual activity after marriage. A similar proportion of respondents (38.56% of men and 40.52% of women) became sexually active with romantic partners they were dating at the time, but those relationships eventually ended. For the remaining respondents, their first sexual partner was someone with whom they had a non-romantic relationship (18.3% of men and 11.1% of women). The majority of respondents (61.44% of men and 75.16% of women) reported being in love with their first sexual partner. For the remaining respondents, the relationship with their first sexual partner was described as a friendship (7.84% of men and 5.88% of women), affection or liking (18.3% of men and 15.69% of women), or a collegial bond (8.5% of men and 1.31% of women). Only a few participants (3.92% of men and 1.96% of women) reported having no emotional connection with their partner at the time of sexual initiation. Every seventh respondent (16.34% of men and 10.46% of women) stated that they had not been in a romantic relationship with their first sexual partner. The study confirmed that women had fewer sexual partners than men ($Z = 2.87$, $r = 0.164$, $p = 0.004$). The findings also indicated that one in five men (20.45%) and one in four women (25.31%) expressed regret about having initiated sexual activity with someone other than their spouse.

The analysis of marital relationship quality in relation to the number of sexual partners before marriage yielded varied results, with differences particularly noticeable in the group of women (Table 2).

Table 1. Aspects of respondents' premarital sexual experiences

Aspects of premarital sexual experiences		Men		Women		U	Z	r	p
		N	%	N	%				
Engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage	Yes	114	74.51	101	66.01	10832	-1.54	-0.088	0.123
	No	39	25.49	52	33.99				
Initiation partner	Spouse	65	43.14	74	48.37	10577.5	1.48	0.085	0.139
	Former romantic partner	60	38.56	62	40.52				
	Friend	5	3.27	5	3.27				
	Well-known colleague	14	9.15	6	3.92				
	Less-known colleague	4	2.61	2	1.31				
	Stranger	5	3.27	4	2.61				
Feelings during initiation	Love	94	61.44	115	75.16	10191.5	1.65	0.094	0.099
	Friendship	12	7.84	9	5.88				
	Affection	28	18.3	24	15.69				
	Collegial bond	13	8.5	2	1.31				
	No feelings	6	3.92	3	1.96				
Number of sexual partners	1	65	42.48	74	48.37	5453	2.87	0.164	0.004
	2	24	15.69	24	15.69				
	3	24	15.69	26	16.99				
	4	15	9.8	10	6.54				
	5 and more	25	16.34	19	12.42				
Regret that sexual initiation did not take place with one's spouse	Yes	18	20.45	20	25.31	3954	-0.47	-0.027	0.636
	No	70	79.55	59	74.69				

Table 2. Number of sexual partners and the quality of respondents' marital relationships

Quality of the respondents' marital relationships		Number of sexual partners			
		Men		Women	
		<i>Rho</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Rho</i>	<i>P</i>
Marital bond	Empathy	-0.02	0.867	-0.27	0.003
	Mutual understanding	-0.02	0.858	-0.30	0.001
	Cooperation	-0.05	0.594	-0.29	0.002
	Full bond	-0.03	0.774	-0.30	0.001
Communication with the spouse	Support	-0.03	0.716	-0.12	0.184
	Commitment	0.05	0.578	-0.04	0.660
	Depreciation	-0.05	0.563	0.04	0.630
	Full communication	0.03	0.743	-0.08	0.397
Sense of marital compatibility	Intimacy	-0.08	0.400	-0.25	0.006
	Similarity	-0.13	0.175	-0.17	0.070
	Self-fulfilment	-0.06	0.516	-0.33	0.000
	Dissapointment	-0.07	0.480	0.20	0.028
	Full compatibility	-0.02	0.853	-0.27	0.003

Among the women surveyed, a significant negative correlation was found between the number of sexual partners before marriage and the quality of their marital relationship. Specifically, the more sexual partners a woman had before marriage, the lower her levels of: marital bond, including: empathy ($\rho = -0.27$, $p < 0.003$), mutual understanding ($\rho = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$), cooperation ($\rho = -0.29$, $p < 0.002$). It was also observed that the greater the number of sexual partners women had before marriage, the lower their sense of marital compatibility in the domains of intimacy ($\rho = -0.25$, $p < 0.006$) and self-fulfillment ($\rho = -0.33$, $p < 0.000$), as well as – at a tendency

level – similarity ($\rho = -0.17$, $p < 0.070$). Moreover, a higher number of premarital sexual partners was associated with a greater level of disappointment ($\rho = 0.20$, $p < 0.028$) in their current marital relationship. In contrast, no statistically significant results were found for men that would indicate a relationship between the number of premarital sexual partners and the quality of their current marriage.

A detailed analysis of the relationship between the type of first sexual partner and the quality of marital relationships among the women surveyed revealed numerous statistically significant correlations (see Table 3).

Table 3. Types of sexual initiation partners and the marital relationships of the surveyed women

Quality of marital relationships among female respondents			Types of partners during sexual initiation					p
			Spouses	Former romantic partners	Non-romantic partners	H	ϵ^2	
Marital bond	Empathy	M	91.1	88.55	84.35	7.15	0.047	0.03
		SD	9.04	11.5	11.83			
	Mutual understanding	M	88.93	86.11	81.47	6.47	0.042	0.04
		SD	10.25	11.99	13.3			
	Cooperation	M	90.43	87.52	83.53	5.31	0.034	0.07
		SD	9.22	12.56	14.73			
	Full bond	M	270.45	262.18	249.35	7.19	0.047	0.03
		SD	27.76	35.14	38.83			
Communication with the spouse	Support	M	42.4	42.21	41.53	0.47	0.003	0.79
		SD	5.09	5.85	5.44			
	Commitment	M	33	33.98	32.41	2.02	0.013	0.36
		SD	4.99	4.93	4.58			
	Depreciation	M	24.55	24.34	31.35	10.68	0.700	0.005
		SD	6.44	7.42	8.32			
	Full communication	M	117.01	118.13	109.29	4.28	0.028	0.12
		SD	13.76	15.39	15.41			
Sense of marital compatibility	Intimacy	M	31.71	31.16	28.65	4.03	0.026	0.13
		SD	5.19	5.25	5.86			
	Similarity	M	28.18	27.87	26.47	1.09	0.007	0.58
		SD	4.43	4.16	5.36			
	Self-fulfillment	M	27.62	26.53	23.53	9.12	0.060	0.01
		SD	4.05	4.5	4.84			
	Dissapointment	M	19.51	21.81	25.41	4.61	0.030	0.09
		SD	7.26	8.12	11.31			
	Full compatibility	M	128	124.52	113.24	6.85	0.045	0.03
		SD	18.86	19.38	21.02			

The highest levels of marital bond in the areas of emotional empathy ($H = 7.15$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.047$, $p < 0.030$) and mutual understanding ($H = 6.47$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.042$, $p < 0.040$), as well as – at the level of a statistical tendency – in cooperation ($H = 5.31$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.034$, $p < 0.070$), were observed among women whose sexual initiation partner was their current husband. Slightly lower results were found among women who began their sexual life with a partner with whom they were then in a romantic relationship, and the lowest results were noted among those who initiated sexual activity with a non-romantic partner. A similar pattern was observed in relation to the sense of compatibility with their husbands ($H = 6.85$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.045$, $p < 0.030$), particularly in the area of self-fulfillment ($H = 9.12$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.060$, $p < 0.010$). The highest scores on these scales were achieved by women who initiated sexual activity with their current spouses; lower scores were recorded among those whose first sexual partner was a former romantic partner; and the lowest among women whose sexual initiation occurred with a non-romantic partner. The highest level of deprecation directed toward husbands was observed among women whose sexual initiation occurred with a non-romantic partner ($H = 10.68$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.700$, $p < 0.005$). A lower tendency to deprecate their husbands was found among both women whose first sexual partner was their current husband and those who began sexual activity with a then-romantic partner. The greatest disappointment

with the marital relationship was reported by women who experienced sexual initiation with non-romantic partners, while the lowest level of disappointment was declared by those whose initiating partner was their current husband (differences significant at the level of a statistical trend, $H = 4.61$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.030$, $p < 0.090$). Other relationships, despite notable differences in mean scores, did not reach statistical significance. The study found no differences in the quality of marital relationships between respondents who initiated sexual activity with their spouses before marriage and those who did so after marriage.

For the statistically significant results presented above, measured using the Kruskal-Wallis test, Dunn's post hoc test was applied to indicate which groups of women, depending on the type of partner during sexual initiation, differ from one another (Table 4).

The analysis of results for women showed that the type of partner during sexual initiation significantly differentiates the quality of their marital relationships in several key aspects. This was confirmed by the global Kruskal-Wallis tests (Table 3), which justified the use of Dunn's post hoc analysis. Women who initiated sexual activity with their husband (type 1) exhibited a significantly higher level of emotional bonding (mean rank: 85.040) compared to women who initiated with a non-romantic partner (type 3 – mean rank: 53.735; $z = 2.61$, $p = 0.027$). This was reflected in a higher level of emotional empathy (for women who initiated with their husband – type 1 –

Table 4. Mean ranks and Dunn's post hoc test results (adjusted p-values) for pairwise comparisons between groups of women based on the type of partner during sexual initiation

Dependent variables – components of marital relationship quality	Mean ranks of independent variables			Comparisons of female groups based on the type of sexual initiation partner					
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1 vs Type 2		Type 1 vs Type 3		Type 2 vs Type 3	
	(Husband)	(Former romantic partner)	(Non-romantic partner)	z	p	z	p	z	p
Empathy	84.367	76.008	52.647	1.09	0.824	2.64	0.024	1.91	0.167
Mutual understanding	85.133	74.129	56.118	1.44	0.452	2.42	0.046	1.47	0.421
Full bond	85.040	74.895	53.735	1.32	0.555	2.61	0.027	1.73	0.249
Depreciation	75.007	71.476	110.47	0.46	1.000	2.96	0.009	3.19	0.004
Self-fulfilment	85.027	76.169	49.147	1.16	0.742	2.99	0.008	2.21	0.080
Full compatibility	84.527	75.540	53.647	1.17	0.721	2.58	0.029	1.79	0.219

Table 5. Types of sexual initiation partners and the marital relationships of the men surveyed

Quality of marital relationships among male respondents			Sexual initiation partners				H	ϵ^2	p
			Wives (initiation after marriage)	Former romantic partners	Non-romantic partners				
Marital bond	Empathy	M	87.22	88.52	84.89		1.13	0.007	0.770
		SD	13.79	11.59	14.2				
	Mutual understanding	M	84.72	86.21	82.71		0.80	0.005	0.850
		SD	14.16	11.61	14.46				
	Cooperation	M	86.46	88.24	85.04		0.42	0.002	0.935
		SD	14.33	10.36	13.38				
	Full bond	M	258.39	262.97	252.64		0.81	0.005	0.847
		SD	41.52	32.86	41.29				
Communication with the spouse	Support	M	40.44	40.91	39.21		3.04	0.02	0.386
		SD	5.81	5.43	7.83				
	Commitment	M	32.42	33.72	32.5		4.30	0.028	0.231
		SD	5.07	5.05	6.26				
	Depreciation	M	24.74	24.69	25.5		1.52	0.01	0.678
		SD	7.23	7.19	9.27				
	Full communication	M	114.9	116.76	112.63		2.95	0.019	0.399
		SD	15.37	15.08	20.05				
Marital compatibility	Intimacy	M	31.66	31.17	31.04		2.54	0.017	0.468
		SD	4.62	4.37	5.6				
	Similarity	M	27.78	27.74	27.46		0.54	0.003	0.910
		SD	4.37	4.12	4.17				
	Self-fulfillment	M	26.72	28.4	26.29		6.51	0.043	0.089
		SD	4.82	3.39	4.4				
	Dissapointment	M	20.43	20.16	21.64		3.25	0.021	0.354
		SD	6.91	8.05	9.89				
	Overall compatibility	M	125.73	127.29	123.14		2.65	0.017	0.448
		SD	18.93	16.54	19.11				

mean rank: 84.367, vs. women who initiated with a non-romantic partner – type 3 – mean rank: 52.647; $z = 2.64$, $p = 0.024$) and a higher level of mutual understanding (for women who initiated with their husband – type 1 – mean rank: 85.133, vs. women who initiated with a non-romantic partner – type 3 – mean rank: 56.118; $z = 2.42$, $p = 0.046$). Women who initiated sexual intercourse with their husband (type 1) demonstrated a significantly lower level of spousal deprecation (mean rank: 75.007) compared to women who initiated with a non-romantic partner (type 3 – mean rank: 110.47; $z = 2.96$, $p = 0.009$).

Women from the first group also scored higher than those from the third group in the measure of perceived compatibility with their spouse (for women who initiated sexually with their husband – type 1 – mean rank: 84.527, vs. women who initiated with a non-romantic partner – type 3 – mean rank: 53.647; $z = 2.58$, $p = 0.029$), particularly in terms of their sense of self-fulfillment within the relationship (for women who initiated sexually with their husband – type 1 – mean rank: 85.027, vs. women who initiated with a non-romantic partner – type 3 – mean rank: 49.147; $z = 2.99$, $p = 0.008$).

Women who experienced sexual initiation with a former romantic partner (type 2) generally ranked between the group who initiated with their husband (type 1) and the group who initiated with a non-romantic partner (type 3) in terms of mean ranks across most measured aspects of marital relationships. Although women in the second group typically obtained much higher mean rank scores in the assessed areas of marital relationships than women in the third group, statistically significant differences were observed only in the measure of spousal deprecation (for women who initiated with former romantic partners – type 2 – mean rank: 71.476, vs. women who initiated with non-romantic partners – type 3 – mean rank: 110.47; $z = 3.19$, $p = 0.004$). In the area of self-fulfillment, these differences were at the level of a statistical trend (for women who initiated with former romantic partners – type 2 – mean rank: 76.169, vs. women who initiated with non-romantic partners – type 3 – mean rank: 49.147; $z = 2.21$, $p = 0.080$). The remaining differences between these groups of women, despite variations in mean ranks, were not statistically significant. No statistically significant differences were found between the group of women who initiated sexual activity with their

husband (Type 1) and those who initiated with a former romantic partner (Type 2) for any of the variables analyzed.

The analysis of the relationship between the type of partner during sexual initiation and the quality of marital relationships among the men surveyed did not reveal any statistically significant differences that would indicate a relationship in this area (Table 5). However, an analysis of the mean scores obtained by the respondents on the individual scales suggests certain trends.

In the area of marital bonding, which includes empathy, mutual understanding, and cooperation, men who initiated sexual activity with non-romantic partners scored slightly lower compared to those who began their sexual lives within romantic relationships. Similar differences, although also not statistically significant, were observed on the scales measuring communication with their spouse in terms of support, as well as perceived marital compatibility.

Men who initiated sexual activity with non-romantic partners scored lower on the measured scales. Conversely, in the scales assessing deprecation and disappointment in the marital relationship, these men showed slightly higher values compared to those who began their sexual lives

Table 6. Regret over having engaged in sexual activity with someone other than one's spouse and the marital relationships of the respondents

Quality of marital relationships among respondents		Regret that sexual initiation occurred with a partner other than the future spouse							
		Men				Women			
		U	Z	r	p	U	Z	r	p
Marital bond	Empathy	754	-0.14	-0.011	0.89	662	-0.1	-0.008	0.923
	Mutual understanding	701.5	-0.61	-0.049	0.544	643	-0.29	-0.023	0.771
	Cooperation	740	-0.26	-0.021	0.792	666	0.06	0.005	0.955
	Overall bond	734.5	-0.31	-0.025	0.755	654.5	-0.17	-0.014	0.862
Communication with the spouse	Support	1390	-1.5	-0.121	0.134	1678	-2.14	-0.173	0.032
	Commitment	1276	-2.01	-0.162	0.044	1916.5	-1.13	-0.091	0.256
	Depreciation	1706.5	-0.08	-0.006	0.936	1974.5	-0.89	-0.072	0.375
	Overall communication	1551	-0.78	-0.063	0.438	2009.5	-0.74	-0.060	0.460
Marital compatibility	Intimacy	1538	-0.84	-0.068	0.403	1571.5	-2.6	-0.210	0.009
	Similarity	1487.5	-1.07	-0.087	0.287	1311	-3.7	-0.299	0.000
	Self-fulfillment	1374.5	-1.57	-0.127	0.117	1382.5	-3.4	-0.275	0.001
	Dissatisfaction	1618	-0.48	-0.039	0.633	1852	1.41	0.114	0.160
	Overall compatibility	1646.5	-0.35	-0.028	0.727	1528.5	-2.77	-0.224	0.006

within a romantic context. However, these differences are small and, due to the lack of statistical significance, cannot be considered a basis for drawing definitive scientific conclusions.

The study also explored whether the quality of marital relationships differs depending on whether individuals regret having initiated sexual activity with someone other than their current spouse (Table 6).

The results showed that women who expressed regret over having engaged in sexual activity with someone other than their husband, compared to women who did not report such regret, provided significantly less support to their spouses ($Z = -2.14$, $r = -0.173$, $p < .032$). They also reported lower levels of perceived marital compatibility in the areas of intimacy ($Z = -2.60$, $r = -0.210$, $p < .009$), similarity ($Z = -3.70$, $r = -0.299$, $p < .000$), and self-fulfillment ($Z = -3.40$, $r = -0.275$, $p < .001$).

Among men, those who regretted that their sexual initiation had not occurred with their current wife demonstrated significantly lower levels of involvement in building their marital relationship ($Z = -2.01$, $r = -0.162$, $p < .044$) compared to men who did not express such regret.

4. Discussion of the results

The conducted study confirms that the nature of premarital sexual experiences, including the number of partners and the type of partner during sexual initiation, plays a significant role in the later quality of marital relationships, with these associations being particularly pronounced among women. The results are therefore partially consistent with the research hypothesis, which assumed that the number and type of sexual partners would moderately differentiate the quality of respondents' marital relationships. The findings suggest that the emotional and relational context of sexual initiation – especially when the partner is a future or current husband as opposed to a non-romantic partner – and the extent of experiences with different partners before marriage may have long-term implications for the quality of women's marital life.

Consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Kansky & Allen, 2018; Lew-Starowicz, 1990; Vasilenko et al., 2014), the type of partner with whom women initiated sexual activity emerged as a key factor differentiating the quality of their later marital relationships. Women whose sexual initiation occurred with their current spouse demonstrated significantly higher levels of marital bonding (in terms of empathy, mutual understanding, and overall connection), lower levels of partner depreciation, and a stronger sense of marital compatibility (including self-fulfillment), compared to women whose first partner was a non-romantic one. These findings align with previous reports indicating that initiating sexual activity in the context of love, commitment, and emotional closeness – characteristics often found in relationships with a future spouse – fosters positive long-term outcomes (Higgins et al., 2010; Smith & Shaffer, 2013). Moreover, these results are consistent with the studies of Van de Bongardt and De Graaf (2020) and Hawkins et al. (2023), who emphasized that romantic relationships tend to be marked by greater intimacy and better sexual communication, which contribute to overall relationship quality. It is worth noting that in the present study, no statistically significant differences were found in relationship quality between women who initiated sexual activity with their current husband and those whose first partner was a former romantic partner. This suggests that the mere presence of a committed romantic relationship at the time of sexual initiation, even if the relationship did not lead to marriage, may serve as a protective function compared to experiences with non-romantic partners. Furthermore, women who initiated sexual activity with a former romantic partner demonstrated significantly lower levels of depreciation toward their current husband than those who initiated with a non-romantic partner, further highlighting the importance of the relational context of first sexual experiences.

The findings also confirmed, in line with numerous previous reports (Busby et al., 2010; Kansky & Allen, 2018; Sassler et al., 2012; Teachman,

2003), that a higher number of premarital sexual partners among women is associated with lower quality in their later marriages. In the present study, women with a greater number of premarital partners reported significantly lower levels of empathy, mutual understanding, and cooperation (key components of bonding), as well as lower feelings of intimacy and self-fulfillment within the marital relationship, and higher levels of disappointment with their current marriage. These results support the concept of sexual scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973, as cited in Beisert, 2023) and learning theories, including classical conditioning (Bancroft, 2019; Lew-Starowicz, 2004), which suggest that early and varied sexual experiences may shape patterns of intimacy in adulthood.

In the case of men, the results paint a different picture. No statistically significant relationships were found between the number of premarital sexual partners and the quality of their current marriage, nor between the type of partner involved in sexual initiation and marital quality (although some non-significant trends suggested slightly lower scores among men who initiated sexual activity with non-romantic partners). This lack of clear associations in men may stem from gender differences in the emotional significance attributed to sexual experiences, as supported by studies such as Vasilenko et al. (2022) and Schwartz & Coffield (2020). These studies indicate that men are less likely than women to base their satisfaction with sexual experiences, including initiation, on the emotional or relational context in which they occur.

An interesting finding concerns the role of the subjective evaluation of premarital experiences. Respondents (both women and men) who expressed regret over having had sexual intercourse with someone other than their current spouse showed significantly lower quality in certain aspects of their marital relationship (women in terms of support, intimacy, similarity, and self-fulfillment; men in terms of commitment). This underscores the importance not only of the objective facts of one's sexual history but also of their psychological interpretation and emotional processing. These findings are consistent with

research by Paik (2011) and Smith & Shaffer (2013). Negative or ambivalent emotions related to one's sexual past may impact current functioning within a relationship. In the present study, no significant differences were found in marital relationship quality between individuals who initiated sexual activity with their future spouse before marriage and those who waited until after the wedding. This finding aligns with Teachman's (2003) observations for women and suggests that the key factor may not be the timing of sexual initiation relative to the wedding date, but rather the quality of the relationship with the first partner, particularly when that partner becomes the future spouse.

5. Study limitations

Despite the careful execution of the present study, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. One such limitation is the relatively small number of respondents in certain subgroups (e.g., women and men who initiated sexual activity with non-romantic partners), which may have affected the statistical power of the analyses and potentially contributed to the lack of significance in some findings, particularly within the male group. Furthermore, the correlational nature of the study does not allow for causal inferences between the analyzed variables; it only indicates their co-occurrence. The analyses also did not account for potential mediating or moderating variables (e.g., personality traits, attachment styles, religiosity, quality of sexual communication), which may influence or modify the observed relationships.

A potential direction for future research could involve conducting analyses on larger, more representative samples, which would allow for more reliable generalizations. It would also be valuable to employ longitudinal studies, enabling the tracking of relationship development trajectories over time and offering a better understanding of how early sexual experiences influence later marital life. Additionally, incorporating the aforementioned mediating varia-

bles and using qualitative research methods would be beneficial, as they could provide a more in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they assign to their sexual histories.

6. Practical implications

The study findings highlight the need for comprehensive psychosexual education that addresses not only the biological and technical aspects of sexuality but also the emotional and relational context of engaging in sexual activity. Particular emphasis should be placed on the potential long-term consequences of premarital sexual decisions for future functioning within marital relationships. In light of the results,

educational efforts in the area of sexuality need to promote behaviors among young people that support initiating sexual activity with partners with whom they intend to build lasting marital relationships. The results suggest that sexual partner stability may have a positive impact on the quality of women's marital relationships, particularly in the areas of emotional bonding and perceived marital compatibility. From a psychotherapeutic and counseling perspective, it is important to consider the history of sexual initiation and attitudes toward past experiences as potential sources of relational difficulties. Working on accepting one's sexual biography, forgiving oneself and one's partner, as well as fostering commitment to the relationship, may support the development of a deeper marital bond.

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